

AN ACCOMMODATION PROGRAM FOR SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE*

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THE PROBLEM of second-generation Chinese has, from time to time, appeared in periodical literature both in this country and in China. We hear complaints and indictments from both Chinese and "the 100-per-cent Americans"; we observe a general attitude of heedlessness and desperation among many young victims of circumstances; and, though less commonly, we hear suggestions for the solution of the problem. But after all there seems still to be a need for an accommodation program for second-generation Chinese.

The following program is based on the writer's observations and contact with the Chinese youth in this country during the last five years. A recent discussion of the program with many leaders of the group encourages the writer to publish it in order to reach more Chinese youth and secure coöperation from those who are sympathetic with or actually working for the welfare of the Chinese in America. The salient purpose of the writer is to stimulate thinking as well as action.

WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROGRAM?

The problem of second-generation Chinese generally involves the following groups: the American public, the Chinese parents, the teachers in public schools, the teachers in the Chinese-language schools, the Chinese children, and

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the grown-up, second-generation Chinese. To consider the question from a practical point of view, however, we shall lay the responsibility only on those who could help in part to avert the existing situation if they would. For this reason the following groups are selected for the discussion, and special stress will be placed on the grown-up second-generation Chinese.

The Public-School Teachers. Theoretically speaking, the teachers in the public schools attended by the Chinese children are best qualified by their training, experience, and duty to give the children a good preparation for an efficient life in America. However, many conscientious teachers frankly told the writer that they could hardly do so because of their inability to understand the children's language, home conditions, and future cultural and vocational possibilities. What we can hope from these teachers, therefore, is: (1) that they will do their best to prevent the breeding of racial prejudice among the children; (2) that they will provide an equal opportunity for the Chinese children to participate in all social and extracurricular activities in school; (3) that they will constantly keep in mind that there are some special needs and interests of the Chinese children which should be provided for; and (4) that if the public school cannot make such provisions for one reason or another, a considerable amount of liberty and stimulation and encouragement should be given to those agencies which may possibly fill the gap.

The Teachers in the Chinese Schools. The teachers in the Chinese-language schools have a good many advantages over public-school teachers in the matter of practical education for the Chinese children. They speak the children's language. They could approach the parents easily and understand the pupils' home conditions, if they would like to do so. By their experience in China and in America,

they should also be able to understand the needs of the children with regard to their future cultural and vocational possibilities. As the Chinese parents generally respect the teachers, according to the Chinese tradition, the teachers in the Chinese school should be in the position to determine what will be most practical and useful for the children to learn in school.

However, all these assumptions will never become true unless there are in the Chinese schools a few who have had adequate training in modern educational work, while the majority of the faculty have the courage to stand for educational reform. So long as there are few who really know what and how to teach, and so long as most of the teachers are in fear of losing their jobs for proposing anything disagreeable to the parents, the natural outcome of the Chinese school will continue to be: (1) that most of the children may waste five or six years there without getting an adequate and practical knowledge of Chinese language and culture; (2) that the difficulty in learning Chinese with the old method and material of teaching may kill the interest of the child for further schooling and learning things Chinese; (3) that the nonactivity program, as in many of the existing Chinese-language schools, for the already tired children after long hours in the public school, may hinder their physical and mental growth; and (4) that the overemphasis on order, obedience, submission, nonaggression, and memory in some of the Chinese schools may cultivate undesirable traits, which will prevent the younger generation from being able to live efficiently in a dynamic society.

One way which the writer may suggest to the Chinese teachers, therefore, is that they should, in the first place, organize themselves for professional improvement in teaching and learning. Secondly, they should plan to make a

thoroughgoing study of the educational needs of the Chinese in America and then, upon facts found out, plan for a practical and efficient program to improve the existing conditions. Lastly, and most important of all, they should always stand like men of the profession.

The Parents. The real factor which controls the fate of the younger generation Chinese is, after all, the parents. Their spheres of influence are both the home and the Chinese-language school.

To be good parents they have to learn modern ways of raising and educating children; for without such knowledge they will not be able to perform their duty and realize their true love. They must know that home environment affects the personality and the future life of the child, and, therefore, must try, as far as their economic conditions may allow, to provide a wholesome home. With regard to their relationship with the Chinese-language school, the writer has found out that they should change their present attitude along the following lines: (1) they must know that education for the children is far more than a mere matter of family pride or tradition—it should be a thing which will make the young worthy members of the society in which they are going to live; (2) they should not judge the type of education desirable for their children by the standards of their own generation; and (3) they should not select any teacher either because he is their kinsman, or because he is poor and needs a job, or because he came from the same district as they did—for teachers selected by standards other than training, ability, personality, and scholarship will have irremediable effect on the children.

The Chinese parents never lack parental love; nor do they ever lack zeal for providing good educational opportunities for their children. What is needed, therefore, is chiefly an efficient system of adult or parent education,

where they can learn all that a good modern parent has to know.

The Grown-up Second-Generation Chinese. As far as the writer can observe, it seems pretty hard for the aforementioned groups to break the existing tradition. It seems to be more logical for us to tie our final hope to the grown-up second-generation Chinese, who have suffered many unendurable consequences of the old régime, and whose experience in different cultural patterns may enable them to interpret the cause and effect of the existing situation and to determine the more desirable course for the generations coming after them.

Unfortunately, most of the grown-up second-generation Chinese do not seem to recognize their unique situation, and face reality bravely. Thus, we find one intelligent writer describing her fellow second-generation Chinese as follows:

That the so-called second-generation problem is not of our making, as we are mere victims of an environment forced upon us from a generation or two ago; and that we are not responsible for the plight in which we found ourselves; that it is not necessary to remind us American-born Chinese of our difficult situations and that we will do the best we can to make a living somehow and have a good time, seem to be a natural opinion for some of us to hold. "Life is short. What difference will it make anyway, a hundred years from now?" This quotation, it seems to me, represents this passive sentiment.¹

This attitude is what we may call "a philosophy of free and easy life." When such a conception of life dominates the sentiment of youth, we can hardly expect anything constructive from them.

¹ Alice Fong, "A Challenge To The Chinese American," *The Western Student* (an occasional supplement to *The Chinese Christian Student*), November 23, 1932.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON

"THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREE AND EASY LIFE"

Generally speaking, people may live in three different ways: (1) to the people of a static society, where everything is endeared by its long association with the individual, life is lived in the main, for the past and man becomes the slave of traditions and customary practices. Any change in the existing order of things would immediately disturb the individual and deprive him of the equilibrium of life. Such people are generally sentimental and often afraid of using any reasoning about things as they have been; they are conservatives—the worshipers of the radicals of the past—and can hardly make adequate adjustment in life in modern society, where mobility of things is a rule rather than an incident.

(2) To the innocent and carefree youth, life is generally taken playfully and cheerfully and for immediate pleasures. They leave the past ruthlessly behind them as the past, and consider any question about the future as silly and nonsensical. They are Epicureans, but cannot be called optimists, because they never have a sense of the future at all. This attitude is especially common among the younger generation of the well-to-do and the wealthier classes of any society. When questioned, these young men often rationalize themselves as wise men who know how to enjoy life while it can be enjoyed. But they will someday discover their fallacy and regret that it is too late for regret.

(3) To the ambitious youth, men of promise, idealists, religious persons, and some philosophers, life appears in various degrees between dream and constructive plan for the future. They can sacrifice any present pleasure for future grandness or for the life to come. They are promising, but their success in the worldly sense of the term will

depend on their ability to see the continuous life processes between the present and the future. The overambitious will not only miss much in the past and present life, but may also be easily disappointed in the future for having too much expectation.

The social and economic conditions of the Chinese youth in the United States are conducive to the second type of attitude towards life. It is not that the Chinese here are all well-to-do. It is, on the contrary, because the Chinese American cannot have much cultural, social, and especially economic, outlook. On the one hand, the dynamic forces of the American society compel him to give up the static conception of life, though it has been the philosophy of his forefathers. On the other hand, the lack of opportunity and outlook as compared with other dominant races in America will naturally prevent him from adopting the third type of attitude mentioned above.

But things that seem to be natural are by no means necessarily desirable or justifiable. For the time being, the Chinese youth here may of course hold "the philosophy of a free and easy life," but they should not forget that a "free and easy life," as the term is used here, is always conditioned by the social and economic situations of the country, and that in a dynamic society the social and economic conditions, especially those of the Chinese as a group, are liable to unexpected changes—the present depression is an excellent illustration. Thus, if our youth do not have anything dependable and firm irrespective of changing circumstances, how long will they be able to hold such a "philosophy?"

Furthermore, the so-called free and easy life is generally based on things superficial and temporary. The happiness derived from such a conception of life is also necessarily superficial, temporary, and often at the expense of greater

happiness. As human beings, we must be able to live on a higher level than lower animals for whom life is not much more than a continuous change between pleasure and pain.

Besides this practical conception of life, the Chinese youth still need a more aggressive attitude towards the life situation. We often hear Chinese people in this country complaining against "racial prejudice" and "inequality of opportunities." These and other unjust racial relationships undoubtedly exist, but the fault is really ours if we do not try to show and prove to other people that their conception of our race is wrong. We must know that the undesirable things in life are generally very much like bad dogs; the more we try to run away from them, the more fierce will they become. As a race, we Chinese have too long been taught to be modest and self-reserved. These were supreme qualities in the good old days. But in a dynamic age we should be more aggressive in dealing with situations.

A TENTATIVE OUTLINE OF WHAT A SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE SHOULD DO

In accordance with the above conception of life we may draw a tentative outline of what the second-generation Chinese should do, from which a detailed program may be made with reference to specific situations. This outline may be divided into two parts:

(A) *Concerning the Individual.*

1. Build up a good workable philosophy of life through reading, thinking, and careful observation.
2. Keep one's life problem in mind constantly; do not live for the present alone, especially when it is detrimental to future and greater happiness.

3. Select, as early as possible during high school years, something for a life career; and stick to it, utilizing every possible opportunity to develop one's capacity and skill along the same line.
4. The subject for specialization should be based on four important considerations: (a) one's true interest; (b) personal capacity—both mental and physical; (c) one's social and economic resources; and (d) the future needs and possibilities of the community in which one is going to live.
5. Determine to eliminate any habit that will keep one from higher ideas and greater achievements in the future.
6. Keep the attitude of the older generation toward hard work.
7. Pay close attention to the social, economic, and political problems of America, China, and the world at large.
8. Cultivate as deep an interest in the life career as one does in games; remember that the game of good life is of course hard to play and cannot be readily appreciated, but the enjoyment it brings will be everlasting.
9. Do not live for self; cultivate the spirit of sacrifice and do so wisely.
10. Be ready to coöperate with the good and stand against the evil.
11. Try to understand the viewpoints of people of different social and cultural backgrounds.
12. Never limit one's social circle to people of one's own race; remember that the best way to enrich life experience is to associate with good people of different nationalities.
13. Be able to face reality bravely and stand any kind of criticism.
14. Try to have a practical knowledge of Chinese language and culture, instead of attempting to know many other languages.²
(This is for both cultural and vocational purposes: Culturally,

² By "practical knowledge of Chinese language and culture" we mean that the second-generation Chinese should learn the most popular language of modern China, instead of learning classical Chinese with Cantonese colloquial expression, as most of the Chinese-language schools here are doing. According to a recent report of the Chinese National Association for Mass Education Movement, "mandarin" or its slight modification, is used by about 80 per cent of the people in China, and it can be put down in writing to form the popular written language of China today, while the Cantonese dialects are used only by people in and from Kwangtung province and do not have corresponding written expressions. This modern Chinese language is also much easier to learn than the classical Chinese. The writer has had two years of experience in teaching in connection with our experimental mass education movement, which has convinced him that it is a fact rather than speculation that the illiterate Chinese farmers and village children can master considerable reading and writing ability of modern Chinese language by spending only one hour a day for four months in the so-called "popular schools."

the intelligent citizens of America now have a growing interest in things Chinese, and their vision in the future development of international relations of the Pacific has convinced them of the need of the American people to have a better understanding of oriental culture and languages. Thus, it is both the opportunity and duty of the Chinese-American to be the medium of culture diffusion and the representative of the better part of the Chinese civilization. As for vocational purpose, a practical knowledge of Chinese language and culture will increase his vocational mobility, both vertically and horizontally.)

15. Start life anew; do not lament over what has been wrong, unless it can serve as an incentive for a better life.
16. Be determined to make opportunities, instead of waiting and envying others for having "good luck."
17. Never excuse oneself by the fact that everybody else has been doing the same thing; for while one's fellow people are asleep, it is one's duty and opportunity for leadership.

(B) *Suggested Group Activities.* We Chinese are often said to lack the ability to organize and coöperate. Individually, we are perhaps as good and capable as any other people of the world; but collectively, we are very much like a heap of loose sand. However, though we may admit this to be the fact, we should not interpret it as something inborn with our race. It is largely due to some weakness in our old system of training. By careful analyzing, eliminating, and correcting the undesirable practices in our traditional system of education, we can surely generate a new spirit in our race. As for the American-born Chinese, the problem of coöperation is made easier by the fact that they have learned in American public schools and society at large many good qualities necessary for group activity and organization. Such qualities are, for instance, sportsmanship, fair play, tolerance, respect for the rights and opinions of other people, self-sacrifice, understanding, generosity, et cetera. What they need is, therefore, to select and determine the most worth while activi-

ties, which may be illustrated by the following sample program for the improvement of the present and future conditions of the Chinese in America:

I. *The Supreme Purpose of All Organizations.* To secure a better social economic and cultural status of all Chinese in America.

II. *Educational Activities.* The most important educational activities for the second-generation Chinese are along two major lines:

(a) *Concerning American Public-School Education.* The educational interests of the American people are generally represented by the board of education. Since the Chinese, even with a large population in a city like San Francisco, can never hope to have a Chinese member on the board, it is doubtful whether the educational interests and needs of the Chinese American have ever been considered. One simple instance for the writer to have such a doubt is the negligence of Chinese language and culture even in those schools where the entire student body, or a large percentage of it, are Chinese children. Hence, it seems advisable for the grown-up second-generation Chinese to have some sort of educational organization to consider their educational needs and interests, and then make suggestions to or coöperate with the city board of education for any necessary adjustment.

(b) *Concerning Chinese Language and Culture.* To meet the demand for a practical knowledge of Chinese language and culture, the grown-up second-generation Chinese should not merely depend on the existing Chinese-language schools with their shortcomings in organization and in curriculum. They should organize themselves for two activities: In the first place, they should try hard to persuade their elders and the teachers to reorganize the Chinese schools on a modern basis. In the second place, they should carry on the following educational activities: (1) to organize adult classes to study modern Chinese language and culture; (2) to utilize the buildings of the existing Chinese schools and other public places for lecture, debate, forum, play, and other meetings for educational purposes; and (3) to organize library and reading circles and other informal organizations for studying Chinese language and culture.

III. *Vocational Activities.* The most needed organization for second-generation Chinese is perhaps a well-organized employment

bureau with branches in all larger Chinese communities. The more important functions of such a bureau are, for example, as follows:

- (1) To secure reliable vocational information for the members.
- (2) To offer proper guidance to younger members in choosing and preparing for future occupation.
- (3) To keep exact, detailed records for the members of their training, ability, character, experience, et cetera, so that whenever there is a position either in this country or in China, the bureau will know who is best fitted for the job and who will make a good reputation for the bureau and other members.
- (4) To coöperate with other bureaus of the same nature in China and in the United States.
- (5) To stimulate interest among the members in their preparation for life careers.

IV. *Social Activities.* In all Chinese communities in America there is plenty of opportunity for organized social work. If somebody would just take the lead, it would not be hard for him to get supporters among the energetic young men and women. What is really needed is to have a good program of important activities which will make the young folks interested in social work. The following are just a few examples of such activities as will appeal to young men and women of a higher type of ability and personality:

- (1) Campaigns for better sanitary conditions in the Chinese community.
- (2) Medical and philanthropic services to the sick, the defective, and other unfortunate people.
- (3) Campaigns against illiteracy among the Chinese population.
- (4) Campaigns against sectionalism and localism.
- (5) Studying the present and future economic possibilities of the Chinese in America.
- (6) Making systematic surveys of the economic conditions of the Chinese in America. Such surveys should be critical, scientific, and constructive, with suggestions for improvement.
- (7) A program of activities to improve the relationship between Chinese people and other nationalities in America.
- (8) Raising funds for carrying on different social activities.
- (9) Other social and recreational activities.

In conclusion, the writer wishes to state that the problem of second-generation Chinese is indeed a very difficult one,

but it is not beyond possible solution. What is needed for the second-generation Chinese is chiefly a little thinking and imagination, which will bring them to the recognition of their unique opportunity at the crucial point of life. If they just care to think, everything will gradually take care of itself.



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